

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 936
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMCONSUL MONTREAL
AMCONSUL TORONTO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 QUEBEC 0130

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: WHAT IS RODRIQUE BIRON THINKING THESE DAYS?

SUMMARY: UNION NATIONALE LEADER, RODRIQUE BIRON, TOLD ME ON MARCH 23 HIS PARTY'S STRATEGY IS BASED ON ASSUMPTION THAT FIRST INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM WILL FAIL. THUS, UN IS NOW BENDING ALL EFFORTS TO REBUILDING PARTY STRENGTH FOR GENERAL ELECTION WHICH IS LIKELY FOLLOW REFERENDUM DEFEAT BY SOME 6 MONTHS. UN WILL NOT ENTER ANTI-REFERENDUM COMMON FRONT. HE SEES REMOVAL OF PQ FROM POWER AS CRITICAL ELEMENT IN BLUNTING DRIVE TO INDEPENDENCE. BIRON REJECTED JOE CLARK AS LACKING IN LEADERSHIP QUALITIES, AND CONFIDED THAT TRUDEAU, IN HIS OPINION, IS ONLY FEDERAL LEADER WITH ENOUGH TOUGHNESS, INTELLIGENCE, AND CHARISMA TO FACE RENE LEVESQUE. TRUDEAU, BIRON ALLEGES, IS NOW PURPOSELY TAKING INFLEXIBLE CONSTITUTIONAL STANCE IN ATTEMPT DRAW CLEAR LINES BETWEEN HIMSELF AND LEVESQUE. IN 6 MONTHS TIME, BIRON SAID, TRUDEAU MAY INJECT CONSTITUTIONAL COMMISSION BETWEEN TWO EXTREMES. THIS BODY WILL THEN SERVE AS LIGHTNING ROD OVER NEXT 2-3 YEARS PREVENTING PQ FROM RAISING EMOTIVE LEVELS AMONG QUEBECOIS TO ADVANTAGE OF SEPARATISM. SUCH ACTION ESSENTIAL IN BIRON'S VIEW AS VOTERS WILL RESPOND PRIMARILY TO
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EMOTIONAL ISSUES IN MAKING CHOICE AT REFERENDUM. SHOULD INDEPENDENCE BE SUCCESSFULLY BLUNTED, BIRON FORESEES MAJOR POLITICAL REALIGNMENT TAKING PLACE IN QUEBEC ALONG IDEOLOGICAL LINES. UN LEADER CLEARLY FAVORS TRUDEAU AS FEDERAL LEADER AND MAY BE TRYING TO ARRANGE COVERT POLITICAL ALLIANCE WITH HIM. MOREOVER, HE VEHEMENTLY DENIED UN WILL GIVE ANY ASSISTANCE TO PC IN COMING FEDERAL BYELECTIONS. END SUMMARY

1. RODRIQUE BIRON, LEADER OF UNION NATIONALE PARTY (UN), TOLD ME MARCH 23 THAT HE IS BASING HIS PARTY'S STRATEGY ON ASSUMPTION FIRST INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM IN QUEBEC WILL BE DEFEATED. AS A RESULT, UN WILL NOT NOW JOIN IN ORGANIZING COMMON FRONT OF FEDERALISTS, BUT WILL ENTER INTO AD HOC COALITION WITH LIBERALS AND OTHER FEDERALISTS 3-4 MONTHS PRIOR TO REFERENDUM. SHOULD GERARD D. LEVESQUE STILL BE LEADER OF LIBERALS AT THAT TIME, BIRON CONFIDED THAT THERE WOULD BE NO DIFFICULTY IN CLOSE COOPERATION BETWEEN TWO PARTIES.

2. BIRON IS NOW PREOCCUPIED WITH REBUILDING UN IN ANTICIPATION OF GENERAL ELECTION WHICH WOULD "INEVITABLY" FOLLOW REFERENDUM DEFEAT. IT IS MOST CRUCIAL, HE RECKONS, TO DRIVE PQ FROM POWER THUS AVOIDING FURTHER REFERENDA. WHILE BIRON IS CONFIDENT FIRST REFERENDUM WILL BE BEATEN, IF QUESTION IS BASED "FAIRLY" ON BASIS SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION, HE IS NOT SO CONFIDENT OF THE OUTCOME OF A SECOND OR THIRD REFERENDUM. "PEOPLE MIGHT GET ACCUSTOMED TO THEM," HE SAID, AND "PRESENT FEAR OF SEPARATISM COULD WEAR THIN."

3. BIRON CONSIDERS APPROACH BEING TAKEN BY "QUEBEC-CANADA ASSOCIATION"

AS DANGEROUS. THUS FAR, ASSOCIATION'S MEMBERSHIP IS MAINLY ANGLOPHONE. BIRON FEARS THIS COULD INCITE TRIBAL REACTION AMONG FRANCOPHONES POLARIZING QUEBECERS ON ETHNIC LINES. RATHER, HE WISHES ASSURE CONFRONTATION IS BETWEEN QUEBECERS WHO FAVOR FEDERALISM AND QUEBECERS WHO WANT INDEPENDENCE.

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RM REJECTING JOE CLARK AS LACKING IN NECESSARY LEADERSHIP QUALITIES, BIRON SAID TRUDEAU IS ONLY LEADER ON FEDERAL SCENE WITH ENOUGH TOUGHNESS, INTELLIGENCE, AND CHARISMA TO COUNTER RENE LEVESQUE. BIRON CLAIMS BE IN TOUCH WITH TRUDEAU AND WITH PROVINCIAL PREMIERS FROM OTHER PROVINCES. HE BELIEVES TRUDEAU IS NOW ATTEMPTING POLARIZE QUEBEC/OTTAWA DEBATE WITH HIMSELF AND LEVESQUE AT OPPOSITE ENDS OF ISSUE. IN ABOUT SIX MONTHS, BIRON HOPES TRUDEAU WILL INJECT NEGOTIATING FORCE BETWEEN EXTREMES IN FORM OF CONSTITUTIONAL COMMISSION BASED ON MODEL SUGGESTED BY PROFESSOR LEON DION IN "LE DEVOIR" (QUEBEC 0059) AND SUPPORTED BY OTHER NOTABLES SUCH AS "LE DEVOIR" EDITOR CLAUDE RYAN.

5. SUCH A COMMISSION, BIRON SAID, MIGHT BE GIVEN SOME TWO YEARS FOR THEIR STUDY. IN MEANTIME TRUDEAU WOULD EXPECT EXISTENCE OF COMMISSION TO REDUCE INTENSITY OF EMOTIONS INVOLVED IN INDEPENDENCE DEBATE AND FORCE BOTH SIDES TO BE MORE AMENABLE TO MAKING CONCESSIONS. IF THIS TACTIC PROVES SUCCESSFUL, BIRON REASONED, PQ WOULD HAVE DIFFICULTY IN RAISING LEVEL OF

EMOTIONAL

SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENCE NECESSARY TO ASSURE A SUCCESSFUL
REFERENDUM IN 2-3 YEARS TIME. LIKE VIRTUALLY ALL OTHER
QUEBECOIS, BIRON CONSIDERS PRESENT CONFEDERAL SYSTEM IS UNWORKABLE
AND WISHES SEE CLEAR DIVISION OF POWERS BETWEEN FEDERAL AND
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS WITH NO CONCURRENT POWERS TO CREATE
AMBIGUITIES AND FRICTION.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 QUEBEC 0130

6. REFERENDUM, BIRON IS CONVINCED, WILL BE WON OR LOST ON EMOTIONAL
ISSUES. AVERAGE QUEBECOIS IS INTERESTED PRIMARILY IN ASSURING HIS
RIGHT TO SPEAK FRENCH AND IN JOB SECURITY. CEREBERAL ECONOMIC
AND PHILOSOPHIC ARGUMENTS ARE NOT UNDERSTOOD AND WILL BE APPRECIATED
BY ONLY A SMALL ELITE MINORITY. THUS, THE KEY TO DEFEATING THE
SEPARATIST DRIVE, BIRON BELIEVES, IS TO PREVENT THE PQ FROM
EXPLOITING HIGHLY EMOTIVE ISSUES. THUS, HE FAVORS ABOVE STRATEGY
HE ASCRIBES TO TRUDEAU.

7. LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE, BIRON, LIKE GERALD D. LEVESQUE AND
JEAN-PAUL L'ALLIER (QUEBEC 0082 AND 0068), ALSO FORESEES A
POLITICAL REALIGNMENT COMING ONCE THE INDEPENDENCE DRIVE HAS BEEN
BLUNTED. HE CLAIMS THERE ARE SOME 15 PQ DEPUTIES WHO ARE CON-
SERVATIVES AND NOT REALLY FULLY COMMITTED SEPARATISTS. BIRON
CLAIMED THIS GROUP INCLUDES: CLAUDE MORIN; JACQUE-IVAN MORIN;
YVES DUHAIME, MIN OF TOURISM; AND YVES BERUBE, MIN
NATURAL RESOURCES. THE LIBERAL PARTY, HE SAID, ALSO CONTAINS
CONSERVATIVE AND PROGRESSIVE FACTIONS WHICH COULD DIVIDE ALONG
IDEOLOGICAL LINES. THE END RESULT OF FORESEEN LARGE SCALE
RESHUFFLING WOULD BE TWO PARTIES ROUGHLY BASED ON IDEOLOGY.

8. SPEAKING MORE PERSONALLY, BIRON SAID HE BELIEVES A POLITICIAN'S
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PUBLIC IMAGE IS KEY TO POLITICAL SUCCESS. DESPITE UNHAPPINESS
ENGENDERED AMONG PARTY "OLD TIMERS," BIRON IS ATTEMPTING GIVE NEW,
VIGOROUS IMAGE TO ONCE TIRED UN. FOR HIMSELF, BIRON SAID HE IS
ATTEMPTING BUILD IMAGE OF "STATESMAN" BY MAKING FREQUENT VISITS
TO OTHER PROVINCES AND TO OTTAWA. HE WILL BEGIN VISITING U.S. IN
NEAR FUTURE. NEWS COVERAGE RESULTING FROM HIS TRAVELS, BIRON
BELIEVES, IS BEGINNING TO GAIN HIM MORE PUBLIC NOTICE AND
RESPECT IN QUEBEC. ALREADY, UN IS HAVING GREATER SUCCESS IN
RECRUITING YOUNGER MEMBERS AS RESULT OF MORE DYNAMIC IMAGE,
PARTY LEADER CLAIMED.

9. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH BIRON IMPLIED ABOVE OUTLINE OF FEDERALIST
STRATEGY IS BASED ON PRIVELEGED KNOWLEDGE OF PM'S PLANS,
IT MAY BE NO MORE THAN HOPEFUL SPECULATION.
UN LEADER CONFIDED THAT HE EXPECTS TO MEET PRIVATELY
WITH TRUDEAU IN APRIL. PRESUMABLY, HE WILL PRESS PM GO FORWARD
WITH ABOVE STRATEGY. BIRON HINTED THAT HE IS ALSO HOPING FORGE
SOME KIND OF COVERT POLITICAL ALLIANCE WITH TRUDEAU AND
EMPHATICALLY DENIED UN AS A PARTY WOULD GIVE SUPPORT
TO CONSERVATIVES IN UPCOMING FEDERAL BYELECTIONS.
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